

AN ENTERPRISING STORY—

How Wisconsin Precision Casting Integrated Its Business Software System

by Cliff Fischer
Wisconsin Precision Casting

EDITOR’S NOTE: This is the first of two articles on Wisconsin Precision Casting’s experience integrating a business software program. Part 2: Was it worth the effort?

Wisconsin Precision Casting’s information system is as much of an integral component of our company, as is manufacturing equipment, dies, molds, gages, and fixtures. When deciding to accept the challenge to integrate our business software system, we asked ourselves, “How can our ERP (enterprise resource planning) system satisfy our requirements?” Our ERP system has provided an integrative approach, facilitating communication throughout the same system, ensuring that everyone is speaking the same informative language, proving to be a truly enterprising system.

Before choosing a software partner, we had two choices: 1. to do it ourselves, in-house, or 2. to partner with a company that understands our business, expectations, and needs. We found it to be a huge undertaking to find a software partner, but wanted to make sure that this company could supply us with the tools and fixtures that would work throughout our environment. We also examined our objective, and asked ourselves, “How can this integrative software help our company accomplish these objectives?”

The information system is an important tool, similar to ovens, melting furnaces, machinery, etc. in our shop, which helps to satisfy our customers. It may be considered the most important tool because it works as the “how to” of everything, sending information to our employees to help them perform their jobs better. Information is the key, in my belief, to a successful manufacturing organization. Our integrated system provides

sales, manufacturing, engineering, quality assurance, accounting, purchasing, etc., allowing universal communication and eliminating the need for people to enter information numerous times, which I consider to be one of the true advantages of an ERP system.

Challenges occurred throughout this process, as expected, but we’ve managed to overcome these challenges with these nine important rules:

Rule #1:

Do it right the first time

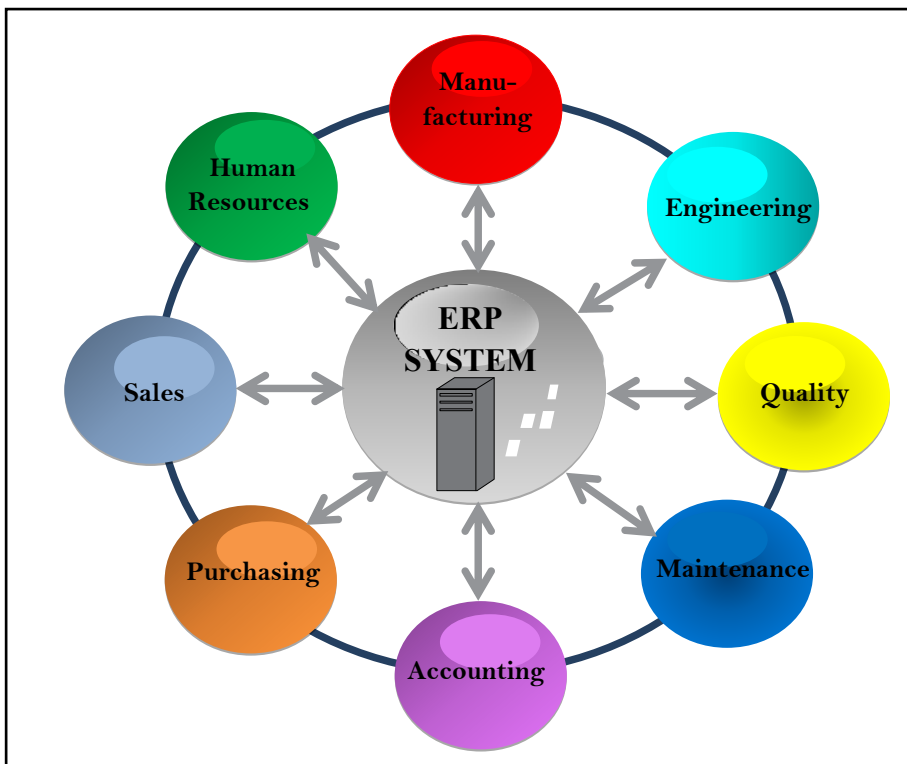
Accuracy and accountability are imperative throughout the integration process. Do it right the first time, and hold everything accountable. If you can’t do it right the first time, hold off to the side until you can do it right. Error prevention is a key component to achieving success.

Rule #2: Deal with the “overwhelming” feeling

Confront that overwhelming feeling. Throughout this process you are going to uncover rocks and stones that are going to be cavernous underneath and you are going to get that feeling of being overwhelmed. It is essential that you deal with that overwhelming feeling. Remember the saying, “How do you eat an elephant...one bite at a time.” The same is true here. We broke it down and divided the work up among engineers and had our software company develop custom programs, ultimately working through it together.

Rule #3: Everyone must be on the same page

This rule is critical throughout the process. If there is anyone who is subversive or not supportive, this transition will never work. The way you do that is through communication, and so everyone



understands the ultimate goal and the direction the company is taking. Everyone may not be at the same point on the page, but everyone needs to be on the same page.

Rule #4: People “can” use a computer– attitude

There are a lot of people that have the attitude “hourly and shop people don’t know how to use a computer.” In reality, this is the information age and most of them use smart phones and surf the internet. Now, can people make errors? Yes, but it is our job to design a system that utilizes editing and protection features to minimize bad data.

Rule #5: Be somewhat open with the data

You have to be as open as possible and share as much data with your employees as you can. Does that put

me at risk sometimes? Yes, it does, but I’ve learned that the more trust I put into people the more it benefits our company. Employees then begin to understand and are more willing to accept change.

Rule #6: The “they don’t need that” mentality

Abolish the mentality that “they don’t need to know that,” or “that’s for the management team.” We need to understand that people need information and tools to do their jobs properly. The more information you share with people, the more knowledgeable they become and the more willing they are to help. We noticed that more and more ideas are derived from the bottom up rather than the top down. We have one of the most adaptable work forces that accept and understand change because they see the positive of what change can do. We’ve

grown as a company and have hired more people because of our technology.

Rule #7: Stop the “we’ve always done it this way” attitude

Stop using this sentence immediately! Oftentimes there can be resistance to even the smallest changes. People tend to resist what they don’t understand. Once again, open communication among everyone is critical when trying to enforce change. When our people understood why we were making changes and knew the benefits would be, they were much more open to ideas and willing to accept them.

Rule #8: Divide and conquer approach

You will come across situations that are large and overwhelming, but split them up into “bite size” pieces. By split-



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ting the work up, we managed to meet our goal quicker. If we had waited for an IT group to come in and handle it, we would have never gotten it done. Keep in mind that in order to guarantee consistency, there must be a funnel or focal group to make ultimate decisions.

Rule #9: Continuous improvement mind-set

This may be considered the most important rule of all. We want to make sure we do it right the first time, but there is going to be a continuous improvement process. By keeping the mindset that change and improvement is a continual progression, this will help employees understand and adapt to change better.

The journey for change must begin by:

1. **Make the commitment.** Don't forfeit! Stick to your commitment no matter what.
2. **Set the goal(s).** Set small achievable goals that can be easily attained. Experiencing success will motivate continuous progress.
3. **Define the Rules.** A must! You have to establish rules and boundaries, otherwise errors will occur.
4. **Pick a Starting Point.** Choose a department that drives you to all facets of your organization. We chose Engi-



Monitors at every step of the process— People can use a computer. It's a matter of attitude.

neering because we are an Engineering company.

5. **Address each problem as it arises.** If you procrastinate, you'll end up with a pile of problems. It is much easier to handle problems on an individual basis.
6. **Communicate with your software vendor.** Their experience and ideas will help you overcome obstacles.
7. **Never give up!** The best piece of advice I could give anybody. You have to drive hard for what you want. When you get there it is a truly rewarding feeling. I know we're not there yet, but I still have that rewarding feeling. I can see in our shop where we came from,

and realize the accomplishments that we have made thus far and will continue to strive for improvement.

This is only the beginning. Change cannot be implemented overnight, and we have a long road ahead of us. This process began with a commitment, but will continue through a revolution that will help us grow as a company. Hard work and dedication from all our employees is the key and we will continue to change and adapt. Our business model is a work in process, and our strive for improvement will never cease. Our company has been exceedingly rewarded through the benefits we have gained in this process; and we are looking forward to the next chapter of our journey.



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